

VZCZCXRO6817
PP RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHBC #0101/01 1641016
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 131016Z JUN 06
FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0378
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0397

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000101

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/13/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SUNNI CLERIC PESSIMISTIC ON BASRAH SECURITY SITUATION

REF: A) BASRAH 78; B) BASRAH 89; C) BASRAH 96

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,
Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. Summary: On June 12, the Regional Coordinator (RC) and Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) met with Sheikh Khalid al Mullah, a moderate Sunni Imam. During the meeting, Sheikh Khalid said that the security situation remains dismal and Sunnis in Basrah are continuing to flee because of intimidation and assassinations. He expressed frustration with the lack of help from the local government that remain inert due to infighting. According to Sheikh Khalid, the security situation in Basrah has deteriorated since the Prime Minister's May 31 "State of Emergency" declaration. He said that unless something is done soon to help the Sunni community, the threat of assassination would continue to force them to leave Basrah. End summary.

DISPLACEMENT AND ASSASSINATIONS

¶2. On June 12, the RC and DRC met with Sheikh Khalid al Mullah, a moderate Sunni imam and close REO contact, to discuss the security situation in Basrah. He pointed out that there were two factors affecting Sunnis in Basrah, displacement and assassinations. Sheikh Khalid estimated that over the last two months, approximately 500 Sunni families had fled Basrah for other Iraqi cities (Mosul, Bayji and Anbar) and Jordan and Syria. He estimated that the numbers would increase over the next month and that approximately 50 percent of Sunni families in Basrah had already left or were planning to leave, with 40 Sunni families leaving Basrah daily. Sheikh Khalid said that the number of Sunnis assassinated over the past two months also increased.

¶3. Sheikh Khalid stated that the local government was doing nothing to help the Sunnis of Basrah and that he had met with the Governor, Mohammed al Wa'eli, various political parties and security forces. When asked what he was told by Governor Wa'eli, Sheikh Khalid responded that the Governor did what he always did which is to blame other political parties for Basrah's security problems. He said that many of the other political parties, in turn, blamed the Governor for all of the security problems. Sheikh Khalid said all the political parties - and their militias - are the root of the problems facing Basrah and share in the responsibility for the violence.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

¶4. According to Sheikh Khalid, the security situation in Basrah has worsened since the announcement of a State of Emergency by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. He cited increased

assassinations and the bombing of the marketplace as examples (Ref C). He said that he has not seen an increased Iraqi Army (IA) presence in Basrah, but affirmed that it would be very welcome. Sheikh Khalid suggested that an increase in the number of IA in Basrah and weeding out bad and corrupt officers in the Iraqi Police Service (IPS) is the only viable way to control or decrease the level of violence in Basrah. He opined that people did not trust the IPS and that increased presence of the IA would make people feel safer. Sheikh Khalid said that when citizens see Coalition Forces on patrol it makes them feel safe, unlike when they see a heavy IPS presence.

DISAFFECTED SUNNI YOUTH

15. Sheikh Khalid reiterated comments he has made previously that the Sunnis in Basrah are different from Sunnis in the rest of Iraq. He stated that the Sunnis in Basrah were not violent and have never opposed Coalition Forces. He expressed frustration that the Sunnis in Basrah were paying for the mistakes of Sunnis elsewhere in Iraq. According to Sheikh Khalid, approximately 70 percent of young Sunnis in Basrah have fled for other regions in Iraq. He is deeply concerned that these young people would go to more volatile cities and participate in violent activities and then return to Basrah and pursue the same activities they learned in the north. He was afraid that the youth that had left would import the violence from other parts of Iraq.

PERSONAL TRAGEDY

16. When asked if Sunni intimidation was still taking place, Sheikh Khalid replied in the affirmative. He stressed that the intimidation took on three forms; direct personal threats, threatening letters or notes and the assassination of a family member that would prompt the rest of the family to flee. Sheikh Khalid then said that his 13-year-old son had been kidnapped 10 days ago. He said that his son was beaten and had his fingernails removed. After being held captive for four days he was released when Sheikh Khalid paid the kidnappers US\$12,000.

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The kidnappers told him that this time it was merely a kidnapping but if he and his family did not leave Basrah, the next time his son would be killed. Sheikh Khalid has since moved his family to Damascus, Syria. He did not know who was responsible for the kidnapping.

17. Sheikh Khalid said that he had no intention of leaving Basrah. He has minimal security in the form of a few bodyguards and said that he only leaves his home when absolutely necessary. He wanted to stay in Basrah with the hope that he could help make a difference. Sheikh Khalid said that Sunni extremists who previously criticized and would not speak to him because of his relationship with Coalition Forces are now beginning to understand that engagement with all parties is important. Some Sunni extremists now are coming to speak with him on a regular basis.

COMMENT

18. Comment: Sheikh Khalid is always willing to meet with Coalition Forces and publicly denounce militia and sectarian violence. He genuinely wants to help end the violence in any way that he can, even if it means risking his own life by staying in Basrah. The security situation in Basrah is bad for the average citizen of Basrah, but for the Sunnis it is even more perilous. The Prime Minister's declaration of a "State of Emergency" on May 31 gave the Sunnis in Basrah hope that violence against them would diminish. However, two weeks later, there still is no improvement in their particular situation. End comment.
GROSS